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DEPT FOR AF/E AND AF/PD
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: ERITREA'S MFA ISSUES RARE APOLOGY

REF: ASMARA 298

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

1. (SBU) MOI ATTEMPTS TO HALT THE AMBASSADOR'S PRESENTATION

The Eritrean MFA told Embassy Asmara in August to suspend PD outreach activities until further notice (ref). On November 9 MFA informed post in writing that scheduled PD activities could resume, but only until November 25. As part of post's monthly lecture series, the ambassador planned to speak at an auditorium near the American Center on November 12. Post widely advertised the event. The afternoon of the lecture post was informed by the auditorium's manager that the Ministry of Information had ordered the auditorium locked to halt the ambassador's presentation. Post's attempts to reason with the Ministry of Information fell on deaf ears; post informed MFA, which was unable to help in time for the event. Post quickly arranged to hold the presentation at the patio area on the embassy compound, setting up lighting, fire barrels (for warmth), a PA system, projector, snacks, and chairs. About 100 guests attended the ambassador's presentation.

2. (SBU) MFA APOLOGIZES

The MFA called the ambassador in on November 16. Expecting to be lambasted for draft sanctions resolutions or something similar, the ambassador was surprised to hear the deputy foreign minister (equivalent) issue a straightforward apology for the disruption to the PD presentation the previous week, saying it was the result of poor communication between the two ministries. Further, he informed the ambassador that post's planned PD activities could resume beyond November 25.

The ambassador thanked the ministry for the apology and permission to be able to resume PD outreach events (Note: Post has not received any formal diplomatic note on this issue, but will presume that coordination with MOI and National Security has taken place in advance of our next event scheduled for November 18). He then raised the issue of in-country travel restrictions, few Eritrean visas for TDY USG visitors, the lack of a license for the new COM vehicle, and unanswered requests for physical security improvements at the chancery. The ruling party's political director, Yemane Ghebreab, phoned the ambassador at the CMR late November 12, also to apologize for the lock-out of the presentation.

3. (C) COMMENT: Wags in Asmara claim there are three things you'll never hear an Eritrean government official say: please, thank you, and I'm sorry. The regime's behavior after the MOI's attempt to torpedo the ambassador's presentation was a rare expression of civility. Perhaps the

exception that proves the rule? In any event, we're glad to be able to resume our popular and effective PD outreach activities.

McMULLEN